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SUBJECT: SO FAR SO GOOD: BOGOTA MAYOR GARZON'S FIRST YEAR  
IN OFFICE

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Summary  
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1. (U) Bogota's left-of-center mayor, Luis Eduardo ("Lucho") Garzon, has avoided controversy and generally refrained from speaking out on national issues, particularly public security. Garzon has drawn relatively little criticism for his administration's management of the city, although his governing coalition in the City Council has shown signs of strain. He has maintained Bogota's credit rating, initiated promised social investment, and maintained existing programs (such as "Transmilenio" metro bus system construction). The democratic left is starting to use him as proof that the left can provide responsible government, but Garzon has deferred any presidential hopes to 2010. End Summary.

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Fiscal Responsibility  
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2. (U) Despite fears that Garzon would empty the city's coffers with social spending, Bogota maintains its AAA credit rating. Revenues are up 10 percent since he took office in January 2004.

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Political Inclusivity  
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3. (U) Garzon named his cabinet from across the political spectrum. He has worked with the private sector to develop his social programs. Unlike his predecessors, Garzon has maintained good relations with the pluralistic City Council, which passed his development plan and requested a budget/debt ceiling (1.7 billion pesos, or roughly USD 7,650,000) for social investment with near unanimity. However, his governing coalition in the Council, which includes members of Garzon's Democratic Pole (PDI, or "Polo") as well as Officialist Liberals and Conservatives, has shown recent signs of strain, including a birthday present to the mayor of a live rabbit (symbolizing unfulfilled promises) by an "Uribista" (allied with President Uribe) councilman.

4. (SBU) Press has reported that Garzon has distanced himself from the PDI and has not delivered expected levels of patronage. Fifteen councilmembers submitted blank ballots in protest when the Council elected Conservative Hipolito Moreno to be its president, despite a post-election deal giving the PDI the presidency in the first year, the Conservatives the second, the Liberals the third, and independents the fourth. However, PDI head and Senator Samuel Moreno told poloffs that Garzon has treated the PDI well and that several leading members are in key positions in the Bogota Administration.

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Social Programs  
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5. (U) "Bogota Without Hunger" is Garzon's signature social program. It features adult and school nutrition programs in Bogota's poorest neighborhoods, farmer's markets to provide low-cost food (the first has opened in Ciudad Bolivar), and augmented vitamin and vaccination programs. Another representative program will pay families that send their children back to school USD 14 per month to offset what the children might have earned on the street. Construction of 38 new high schools is planned.

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Public Space: An Achilles Heel  
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6. (U) Bogota residents complain bitterly about the invasion of public space by street vendors since Garzon took office. After initially relaxing the city's hold on public space, the Mayor has made efforts to limit the influx of under- and unemployed into the city's streets, but with little success. Murders and kidnappings are down, but there is a public perception that an increased presence of street vendors makes

for more street crime.

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Challenges  
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17. (U) Construction of the multi-billion dollar "Transmilenio" metro bus system continues despite the necessary repair of defective paving contracted by the Enrique Penalosa administration (late 1990s) with Mexico's Cemex. Cleaning up the Bogota River will be a daunting challenge, if Garzon chooses to pursue it.

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Presidential Hopes Deferred to 2010  
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18. (SBU) Should the Constitutional Court approve the new reelection law, Garzon could run for President in 2006, provided that he resigns from office by May of this year. He has said publicly, however, that he will not do so. Edgar Ruiz, Garzon's private secretary, told polofffs that Garzon will not run, but added that with a 72 percent approval rating in Bogota, he was just two points behind President Uribe in the city (end of 2004 polling numbers). Ruiz said Garzon's goal is the Presidency in 2010, ideally in coalition with small left and center-left parties and the Officialist Liberals. A near-term goal is for the PDI to develop a strong list of House and Senate candidates. Ruiz pointed to the neck-and-neck polling numbers for Uribe and Garzon in Bogota as a sign that voters might split their ballots in 2006 -- Uribe for President but center-left candidates for Congress. Should the Constitutional Court strike down the reelection law and derail President Uribe's hopes for a second term, several potential opposition candidates -- including Garzon -- might reconsider their options.  
DRUCKER